

Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency: The Role of Family Environment and Self- Esteem

Dr Anita Sharma

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY, HIMACHAL PRADESH UNIVERSITY, SHIMLA-171005 (India)

Email: anitahpu@gmail.com; anita_psychohpu@yahoo.com

Abstract: The study aims to explore the relationship between family environment and self-esteem of delinquents and non delinquents. Sample comprised of 50 delinquents within the age range of 14 to 16 years. Data was gathered by using Self Esteem Inventory (Prasad and Thakur, 1977) and Family Environment Scale (Moos and Moos 1986). For delinquents, findings indicated a negative and significant correlation between desirable aspect of self esteem and cohesion in family environment. For non delinquents, a positive and significant correlation between desirable aspect of self esteem and cohesion in family environment was observed. Non delinquents from highly cohesive, moderate control and less conflict families were higher on desirable aspect of self esteem and reverse was true for delinquents. Results revealed that delinquents and non delinquents differ significantly from each other on the two dimensions of self esteem (i.e. desirable and undesirable) with non delinquents reporting higher self esteem as compared to their delinquent counterparts. Cohesion in family environment played a differential and significant role towards their self esteem. Delinquents have reported significantly higher levels of cohesion conflict and control in their families.

Key Words: Family Environment; Self – Esteem and delinquents

1. Introduction

Delinquency is defined as ‘that behavior in which members of a social group defy or violate their societal norms. This concept applies both to criminal acts of deviance and non criminal acts’ (Hirsichi, 1969). Typical behavior in delinquency includes: being a runaway, shoplifting, drug abuse, liquor offences and assaults of varying degrees. From psychological perspective delinquency is termed as ‘super ego deficiency’ (Prinz 1997) whereas, behavioral perspective holds that the “overall level of childhood deviance is found to be an important predictor of adult deviance than any particular childhood behavior (Sharma, 2012).

Families are major socializing agent for children and the foundation of human society. Children who are rejected by their parents, who grow up in homes with considerable conflict or who are inadequately supervised are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquent (Wright and Wright 1994). Family’s influences in the early years of life of delinquents are intense. Parental ill mannerism, violence, alcohol abuse, maladaptive upbringing and poor living conditions are important determinant of criminal behavior. Children having fewer possibilities to legally satisfy their needs often select inappropriate ways to satisfy their needs.

Besides, coercive parenting and lack of parental monitoring also contributes to the anti- social behavior and association with deviant peers (Hagon and Foster 2001). Research has reported many predictors of delinquent behavior, like intra familial stressors, family conflicts, high frustration, excessive monitoring, and poor inter-personal relationship and weak family communication (Branden 1994; Grave and Crutchfield 1982; CLark & Shields 1997 and Sharma, 2012).

Most of the delinquents reported troubled and disturbed relationship with their family members. Their family environment has never been smoother. As Olson, Russell and Springkle (1989) in their Circumplex Model state that family cohesion, flexibility and communication are the three dimensions important for smoother family environment. It is hypothesized that balanced level of cohesion as well as balance between stability and change make for optimal family functioning. Among numerous etiological factors, phenomenon of single parent, weak interpersonal relationships are considered to be important in subsequent delinquent behavior in youth (Robin 1999).

Self esteem is an individual’s sense of his or her value or worth that is, the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes or likes himself/ herself (Blascovich & Tomaka 1991). It reflects a person’s overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her worth.

Delinquent behavior results in social rejection and devaluation of one's self concept. Kelley (1978) reported a direct correlation between delinquency and low self esteem. Those with low self esteem are more frequently associated with a delinquent act than those with average or above average self esteem. Gilligan (1996), states that those with low self esteem rely more on groups or collective self esteem. Some individuals seek gang membership to compensate for feelings of low self esteem. There is substantial research evidence suggesting that delinquents have a history of devaluing social feedback, which results in impaired or negative self esteem (Tremblay and Craig 1997).

Delinquents are often the label given by the society when adolescents at one time act out destructively or troublesome that results with legal actions (Santrock, 2011). Adolescents are viewed to be in a period of time when they have to deal with many challenges such as hormonal fluctuations, changes in school structure, higher achievement expectations, expanded peer relations and influence, pressures from dating and emergent sexuality (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000). Predictors of delinquency include authority conflict, cognitive distortions, personal characteristics and even socioeconomic status (Santrock, 2008).

Parental and family influence are also predictors of delinquency as delinquents often come from families which parents practice uninvolved parenting style. Thus, the parental marital quality and family environment is associated with delinquency. Since marital dyad plays a pivotal role in providing cohesiveness and stability for the entire family, the quality of marriage can have a pervasive effect on family life as a whole. The quality of marriage can also affect the adaptation of individual family members, such as their children (Feldman & Fisher, 1997). Consequently, family environment is an influential factor in the development of delinquent behaviour among adolescents. As supported by researchers (Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Long, 1997; LeBlanc, 1992), family environment is a strong predictive factor of delinquent behaviour in adolescents. Hence, this research aimed to identify the differences in family environment and self-esteem of delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents.

Present study is the pioneer attempt in India to study:-

1. The relationship between family environment (in terms of cohesion, control and conflict) and self esteem (desirable and undesirable aspect) of delinquents and non delinquents.
2. The extent of difference that exist between delinquents as well as non delinquent subjects on cohesion, conflict, control and desirable and undesirable self esteem.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

50 male juvenile delinquents were taken from the Observation Home for Boys (Dpt. Of Women and Child Welfare, Delhi). They had criminal record like shop lifting, dacoits, rape and theft etc. And 50 non delinquent males were taken from Local High School of Shimla. The age range of both the sample was between 14 to 16 years.

2.2. Instruments

- 1) Self Esteem Inventory (Prasad & Thakur 1977)
- 2) Family Environment Scale (Moos and Moos 1981-1986)

2.3. Self Esteem Inventory (Prasad & Thakur 1977):-

A 30 item, Hindi self esteem inventory has been used for the present purpose. The subjects were asked to rate themselves on a seven point scale for each statement, as what they think of themselves. Reliability of the scale is .69; high score indicates high self esteem.

2.4. Family Environment Scale (Moos and Moos 1981-1986):-

This scale is developed to measure social and environmental characteristics of families. This scale is composed of 10 subscales that measure the actual preferred and expected social environment of families. For the present purpose, only 3 subscales were used, they are as follows:-

Cohesion- the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another.

Conflict- the amount of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members.

Control- how much set rules and procedures are used to run family.

Internal consistency reliability estimates ranges from .61 to .78.

3. Results

Co-relational analysis was carried out in order to examine the degree of inter personal relationship among the variables of cohesion, control, conflict and desirable as well as undesirable aspect of self esteem for the delinquents and non delinquents separately by using Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation. (Table 1).

Table-1: Table (1) Correlation between Cohesion, Control, Conflict and Desirable and Undesirable Aspect of Self-Esteem for Delinquent Boys (The Upper Diagonal) and Non Delinquent Boys (The Lower Diagonal).

DELINQUENT BOYS					
Variables	Cohesion	Conflict	Control	Desirable self esteem	Undesirable self esteem
Cohesion	X	-.190	.127	-.443**	.192

Conflict	-.048	X	.155	.059	.110
Control	.174	.002	X	-.200	-.069
Desirable self esteem	.336*	.191	-.076	X	-.279*
Undesirable self esteem	.001	.175	-.085	0.35	X

NON DELINQUENT BOYS

** p<.01; * p<.05

Table 1 reveals that only cohesion is negatively and significantly correlated to desirable aspect of self esteem ($r = .443^{**} P < .01$) for delinquents and only cohesion is significantly and positively related to desirable aspect of self esteem ($r = .336^{*} P < .05$) for non delinquents.

t- test analyses was also conducted to see the difference between delinquents and non delinquents on all the above

mentioned variables (Table-2). Results of t-test (Table-2) revealed that delinquents are experiencing significantly ($p < .01$) high cohesion as well as control and conflict in their families than their non delinquent counterparts. However, non delinquents are having high self esteem (desirable and undesirable) as compared to their delinquent counterparts.

Table-2: t- test Analyses for Delinquents and Non delinquents on Family Environment and Self-Esteem

Variables	Delinquents		Non delinquents		t-value
	Mean X	S.D.	Mean X	S.D.	
Cohesion	7.48	1.02	6.62	1.14	3.98**
Conflict	6.20	1.48	4.62	1.24	5.76**
Control	5.68	1.22	4.74	1.14	3.98**
Desirable	78.06	8.37	89.22	9.26	6.32**
Undesirable	46.28	12.68	56.00	16.42	3.31**
Overall	124.30	13.19	143.18	12.58	7.34**

** p<.01

4. Discussion

Cohesion has been defined to reflect emotional bonding among family members and adaptability to reflect family's developmental stress (Olson et al 1983). These subscales measure the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another. It is proposed that level of cohesiveness in the family affects the adolescents in some or the other way. There are four levels of cohesion ranging from disengaged (very low) to separated (low to moderate) to connected (moderate to high) to enmeshed (very high). It is hypothesized that central level of cohesion (balanced) make for optimal family functioning. The extremes (disengaged and enmeshed) are generally seen problematic (Olson 1989).

In the present study results show a negative relation between desirable aspect of self esteem and cohesion among delinquents. It is also evident that delinquents are having high level of cohesion in the family (even higher than their non delinquent counterparts; table 2) and are low on desirable aspect of self esteem. Olson (1989), pointed out that when cohesion levels are high, there is too much consensus within the family members and too little independence. Perhaps because of too much interference from family members they feel that they are not capable of making any decision on their own. This is reflected in their having low level of desirable self esteem.

Further, in the present study, the level of cohesion is significantly lower (table, 2) for non delinquents as compared to their delinquent counterparts and thus may be regarded as more towards balanced cohesion. Thus while on the one hand too much emotional bonding with the

family members lowers the desirable aspect of self esteem for delinquents, the balanced cohesion on the other hand enhances the desirable aspect of self esteem for non delinquents. Rodick, Henggeler and Hanson (1986) reported that healthy families' evidence balanced degree of cohesion and adaptability, whereas problem families evidence extreme degree. Families with balanced degree of cohesion and adaptability possess more positive communication skills, greater warmth and affection than those with extreme degrees.

Extreme control tends to have negative effects on adolescents. Physical punishment and discipline which are lax, neglectful and inconsistent or severe have negative effects on adolescents functioning. Boys who are physically punished experience such negative consequences such as poor internalization of control, low self confidence and covert resentment or rebellion. Excessive control or monitoring in the family hinders the normal and proper functioning of the child in particular males, hence is responsible for delinquent behavior. Enmeshed families lead to lack of control on peer group selection for adolescents (Cashwell and Vacc 1996). The high degree of punishment and perceived parental control seems to lower the self esteem and generate hostility among the adolescents (Amoroso and Ware 1986).

Similarly, high conflict in the families may make adolescents vulnerable towards diffusion, directionless, and aimlessness. In the present study, delinquents have been found to be significantly higher on conflict i.e. family conflicts may lead to alienation between parents and children which in turn often manifests itself in delinquency and drug use (Catalano et al.,1992).

In normal families mostly adolescents are encouraged to think through the likely impact of their behavior on themselves and others, thus adolescents are more likely to develop a mature internalized moral code (Haffman 1998). Therefore such a code makes for child's proper functioning. Thus it is not surprising that non delinquents perceived less control in their families as compared to delinquents. Non delinquents also reported to be confident, happy, highly motivated and have the right attitude to succeed (Haffman 1998).

In a study by Gecas and Schwalbe (1986) the self esteem of males was more strongly affected by the balance between the amount of control exerted by the parents. Data of the present study clearly shows that non delinquents have higher self esteem as compared to their delinquent counterparts.

In Ohio State Research News Grabmeier (1988) found that those with low self esteem frequently associate with a delinquent act than those with average or above average self esteem. Kaplan (1975) found that violations to self esteem serve as major source of hostility and aggression. Rosenberg, Schooler and Schoolbench (1989) and Kelley (1978) found that low self esteem foster delinquency and that delinquency may enhance low self esteem. Families are one of the strongest socializing forces in life. The positive family environment (with positive parenting) teaches children to control unacceptable behavior, to delay gratification and to respect the rights of others. This may be the reason that children of normal family are more prone towards the desirable aspect of self esteem.

Social psychology has long treated self esteem as an important concept for understanding human behavior and psychological well being. Many sociological theories consider low self esteem to be a strong factor in delinquent behavior (Rosenberg, Schooler and Schoolbench 1989). Gilligan (1982) in his studies of murderers conclude that low self esteem is the most common reason for engaging in violence and this is why violent behavior actually increases the self esteem of those who commit it.

5. Conclusion

Thus, from the above findings it can be concluded that low self esteem is an important indicator of delinquent behavior and important variable which clearly differentiates between delinquent and non delinquent boys. Further, both cohesion and control are important dimensions of family environment having a differential impact on the self esteem of both delinquent and non delinquent boys. The findings contribute to the knowledge that self - esteem and family environment may pose as possible antecedents for delinquent behaviour. Thus, parents should constantly monitor their relationship with each other, and provide a loving and conducive home environment for their developing adolescents.

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AUTHOR'S VITAE:



Dr Anita was born in Shimla (INDIA) and obtained her Ph.D. in 2001. She is presently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (INDIA). She is the recipient of best young scientist award and has guided 8 doctoral students. She has published number of research papers at the national as well as at the international level. Her research area includes personality, stress, education, social and positive psychology.